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THE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: A DISTINCTIVE CATHOLIC CONTRIBUTION

MOST REVEREND THOMAS G. WENSKI*

Today we face great environmental challenges as a nation and as a global community. Climate change is at the center of these challenges. Global climate change has captured the attention of scientists, environmental leaders, and policy-makers. What may not be well known is that the Catholic Church and its leaders have addressed the environment and climate change in distinctive and persistent ways.

The Church seeks to make a genuinely religious and authentically Catholic contribution to the discussion of environmental questions, including climate change, by lifting up the moral dimensions of these issues and the needs of the most vulnerable among us.¹ This unique contribution is rooted in our religious and moral teaching and reflects the Church's pastoral service, especially among the poor and vulnerable in our country and around the world.²

For us this concern for the environment and duty to care for creation is not new. It did not begin with Earth Day, but with Genesis itself. This Catholic perspective applies traditional moral values to new ethical challenges. As believers and religious leaders our love and appreciation

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1. Cecilia V. Calvo, *Catholic Social Teaching and Environmental Justice: Faithful Stewards of God's Creation* para. 3 (paper presented at Maryville College for The Maryville Symposium: Conversations on Faith and the Liberal Arts, Maryville, Tenn., Sept. 25–27, 2008) (on file with author) [hereinafter Calvo 1].

2. *Religious and Moral Dimensions of Global Climate Change: Before the S. Comm. on Environment and Public Works*, 110th Cong. (June 7, 2007), available at <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate/June07FinalTestimony.pdf>, at 2 (prepared statement of John L. Carr, Sec'y, Dep't of Soc. Dev. & World Peace, U.S. Conf. of Cath. Bishops) [hereinafter *USCCB Testimony*].

for God's gift of creation begins with the belief that "the earth is the Lord's and all it holds."³ "Our Creator has given us the gift of creation: the air we breathe, the water that sustains life, the climate and environment we share—all of which God created and found 'very good.'"⁴ As bishops we believe that our response to global climate change is a sign of our respect for God the creator and all of God's creation.⁵

In this paper, I will highlight key themes on the environment and climate change lifted up by the Catholic Church and its leaders, including Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and the United States Catholic bishops. These statements emphasize and exemplify connections between Catholic faith and environmental stewardship. I will also present some principles from Catholic social teaching that provide a moral framework for assessing environmental issues, especially climate change.⁶ Finally, I will examine how these moral principles have shaped the United States bishops' approach to public policy on climate change and how other members of the Catholic Church are translating this call to care for God's creation into action.

From the beginning of his papacy, Pope Benedict XVI has emphasized care for creation and the moral dimensions of the environment.⁷ He has been named one of the world's top environmental leaders and been dubbed the "green pope" for his efforts to focus Church teaching on humanity's responsibility to care for the planet and for his steps to make the Vatican City State the world's first carbon-neutral nation. Under his leadership, in April of 2007 the Vatican convened leaders from around the world, including a representative from USCCB, at a major conference on Climate Change and Development.⁸

3. *Psalms* 24:1 (NAB).

4. *USCCB Testimony*, *supra* note 2, at 1 (quoting *Genesis* 1:31).

5. *Id.*

6. For an overview of the relationship between Catholic thought and environmental matters and for an introduction to Catholic Social Teaching, see generally PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE & PEACE, *COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH* §§ 451–87, at 197–211 (2004). See also U.S. Conf. of Cath. Bishops, *Themes of Catholic Social Teaching*, <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml> (last visited Mar. 2, 2009) (summarizing the basic principles of Catholic social teaching, including principles which relate to environmental matters).

7. Lucia A. Silecchia, *The "Preferential Option for the Poor": An Opportunity and a Challenge for Environmental Decision-Making*, 5 U. ST. THOMAS L.J. 87, 91–92 (2008).

8. *Id.* at 92. See Joshua Garner, "Green" Ranking Worthy of Envy—Pope, Nun, Priest Rated Among World's Top Environmental-Friendly Leaders, CATH. NEWS SERV., Aug. 7, 2007, available at http://www.catholic.org/national/national_story.php?id=24962:

Pope Benedict XVI has been ranked as one of the top "green" religious leaders by the online environmental magazine *Grist*. . . . The pope's use of an electric-powered popemobile and solar-power-friendly Vatican City helped him land at No. 6 on the list. *Grist* said the pope has been increasingly vocal about the suffering that climate change will cause for the world's poor.

Following in the path of Pope John Paul II, Benedict XVI has devoted a significant part of his recent World Day of Peace Messages to ecological questions. In his 2008 statement, *The Human Family, A Community of Peace*,⁹ he reminds us that the planet is our home, which “has been given to men and women by God to ‘inhabit with creativity and responsibility’ and to protect with ‘responsible freedom.’”¹⁰

In several statements and documents, John Paul II and Benedict XVI have applied Catholic social teaching principles to environmental questions.¹¹ In Pope John Paul II’s groundbreaking 1990 World Day of Peace Message entitled *Peace With God the Creator, Peace With All of Creation*,¹² environmental questions “were given a spotlight previously unseen in papal documents.”¹³ Through this statement, Pope John Paul II laid a compelling foundation for all that has followed. He declared the environment to be a “moral issue” and reminded the world of an “urgent moral need for a new solidarity.”¹⁴ This document advanced environmental concerns within the Catholic Church and argued that they needed to be addressed “as a matter of faith—in regards to our response to the Creator—and as a matter of ethics—our obligations to our neighbor and other creatures.”¹⁵

In response to this call by Pope John Paul in 1990, the full body of U.S. Catholic bishops adopted their first statement on the environment, *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*. In this foundational statement the bishops draw attention to the ethical dimensions of the ecological crisis,

See also Daniel Stone, *The Green Pope*, NEWSWEEK WEB EXCLUSIVES, Apr. 17, 2008, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/132523>.

9. POPE BENEDICT XVI, MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE: THE HUMAN FAMILY, A COMMUNITY OF PEACE (Jan. 1, 2008), available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20071208_xli-world-day-peace_en.html [hereinafter A COMMUNITY OF PEACE].

10. Calvo 1, *supra* note 1, para. 13 (quoting A COMMUNITY OF PEACE, *supra* note 9, para. 7).

11. Silecchia, *supra* note 7, at 90.

12. POPE JOHN PAUL II, MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II FOR THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE: PEACE WITH GOD THE CREATOR, PEACE WITH ALL OF CREATION (Jan. 1, 1990), available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html [hereinafter PEACE WITH ALL OF CREATION].

13. Silecchia, *supra* note 7, at 91.

14. PEACE WITH ALL OF CREATION, *supra* note 12, paras. 10, 15.

15. Walter Grazer, Called to be Faithful Stewards of God’s Creation: Catholic Social Teaching and the Environment: A Pastoral Response para. 8 (speech presented at the Univ. of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Ind., Feb. 27, 2007) (on file with author).

exploring the link between ecology and poverty and the implications of environmental degradation for human life and dignity.¹⁶

Building on the commitment made by the U.S. bishops in their 1991 statement *Renewing the Earth*, the Environmental Justice Program of the USCCB was created in 1993 to educate and motivate Catholics to a deeper reverence and respect for God's creation, and to engage Catholics in addressing environmental problems, particularly as they affect the poor and vulnerable.¹⁷

Over the past fifteen years, the bishops have "sought to listen, learn, and discern the *moral dimensions*" of care for creation.¹⁸ This effort led them to serious reflection, dialogue, and action on global climate change. In an unprecedented statement adopted by the entire body of United States bishops in 2001, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, the bishops insist that:

[a]t its core, global climate change is not [simply] about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both "the human environment" and the natural environment. It is about our human stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those who come after us.¹⁹

16. U.S. CONF. OF CATH. BISHOPS, *RENEWING THE EARTH: AN INVITATION TO REFLECTION AND ACTION ON ENVIRONMENT IN LIGHT OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING* Part I.A (1991), available at <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/bishopsstatement.shtml> [hereinafter *RENEWING THE EARTH*] ("Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of all of creation.").

See also POPE BENEDICT XVI, *APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI TO SYDNEY (AUSTRALIA) ON THE OCCASION OF THE 23RD WORLD YOUTH DAY (JULY 12–21, 2008), WELCOMING CELEBRATION BY THE YOUNG PEOPLE* para. 19 (July 17, 2008), available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/july/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080717_barangaroo_en.html [hereinafter *WELCOMING CELEBRATION BY THE YOUNG PEOPLE*]:

God's creation is one and it is good. The concerns for non-violence, sustainable development, justice and peace, and care for our environment are of vital importance for humanity. They cannot, however, be understood apart from a profound reflection upon the innate dignity of every human life.

17. See U.S. Conf. of Cath. Bishops, *About the Environmental Justice Program*, <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/background/index.shtml> (last visited Mar. 3, 2009).

18. *USCCB Testimony*, *supra* note 2, at 2.

19. U.S. CONF. OF CATH. BISHOPS, *GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE: A PLEA FOR DIALOGUE, PRUDENCE, AND THE COMMON GOOD* 1–2 (U.S. Cath. Conf. 2001) [hereinafter *A PLEA FOR DIALOGUE*] (quoting POPE JOHN PAUL II, *CENTESIMUS ANNUS (ON THE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF Rerum Novarum)* para. 38 (1991), available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_010519_91_centesimus-annus_en.html).

Along with many others, I am convinced that our response to climate change raises fundamental questions of morality and justice, fairness and shared sacrifice. Our response to the “questions and challenges surrounding global climate change is a test and an opportunity for our nation.”²⁰ “It tests our commitment to the common good, to the poor, [and] to our understanding of stewardship.”²¹

I. A MORAL FRAMEWORK

In testimony before the United States Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in June of 2007, the USCCB highlighted the following three ethical priorities that are central to the upcoming debate and decisions on climate change:²²

A. Prudence

This old fashioned virtue suggests that while we may not know everything about global climate change we know that something significant is occurring. We do not have to know everything to know that human activity is contributing to significant changes in the climate with serious consequences for both the planet and for people, especially those who are poor and vulnerable.²³

The U.S. bishops accept the consensus findings and conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).²⁴ “Significant levels of scientific consensus demonstrate that climate change is real and that the consequences of inaction are serious.”²⁵ The IPCC concluded in its Fourth Assessment Report in 2007 that the “costs of climate change are likely to be significant and to increase over time as average global temperature increases.”²⁶

Prudence requires wise action to address problems that will most likely only grow in magnitude and consequences. Prudence is not simply about avoiding impulsive action, picking the predictable course, or avoiding risks, but it can also require taking bold action

20. A PLEA FOR DIALOGUE, *supra* note 19, at 1.

21. Walter Grazer, Global Climate Change: In Light of Catholic Social Teaching para. 40 (speech presented in St. Petersburg, Fla., Apr. 20, 2008) (on file with author).

22. For further information on the United States bishops’ approach to climate change, see generally A PLEA FOR DIALOGUE, *supra* note 19.

23. USCCB Testimony, *supra* note 2, at 3.

24. A PLEA FOR DIALOGUE, *supra* note 19, at 5.

25. Cecilia Calvo, *The Missing Voice of the Poor in the Climate Change Debate*, www.faithfulcitizenship.org/media/article/calvo (last visited Mar. 3, 2009) [hereinafter Calvo 2].

26. *Id.*; see also INTERGOVTL. PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE, FOURTH ASSESSMENT REPORT, CLIMATE CHANGE 2007: SYNTHESIS REPORT 69 (2007), available at http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr.pdf [hereinafter IPCC REPORT].

[after] weighing available policy alternatives and moral goods and taking considered and decisive steps before the problems grow worse. Prudence tells us that "we know that when a problem is serious and worsening it is better to act now rather than wait until more drastic action is required."²⁷

In last year's World Day of Peace Message, Pope Benedict XVI urged environmental prudence, with the "good of all as a constant guiding criterion" and with a special focus on the poor.²⁸ He stated: "Prudence does not mean failing to accept responsibilities and postponing decisions; it means being committed to making joint decisions after pondering responsibly the road to be taken, decisions aimed at strengthening that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God."²⁹

B. *Common Good*

Often the public debate around climate change can be polarized and divisive. There is a tendency for powerful stakeholders to pursue what is in their own self-interest instead of seeking solutions that benefit the common good. However, the "universal nature of climate change requires" a coordinated and collaborative response. If we are to develop lasting solutions that pursue the common good we must first recognize that "we are all in this together." This ethic of solidarity and the virtue of prudence, which calls for civil dialogue, require us to look beyond our own interests and to act together to "protect what we hold in common."³⁰

Our response to climate change should demonstrate our commitment to future generations. We believe solidarity also requires that the United States lead the way in addressing this issue *and* in addressing the disproportionate burdens of poorer countries and vulnerable people. This is not simply a technical question of drafting legislation and fashioning agreements, but rather, a deeper question of acting effectively on our moral obligations to the weak and vulnerable.³¹

C. *A Priority for the Poor*

"While we are 'in this together,' some are contributing more to the problem while others bear more of the burdens of climate change and the efforts to address it. We should look at climate change from the 'bot-

27. *USCCB Testimony*, *supra* note 2, at 3.

28. *A COMMUNITY OF PEACE*, *supra* note 9, para. 7.

29. *Id.*

30. *USCCB Testimony*, *supra* note 2, at 3.

31. *Id.*

tom-up' for how it touches the poor and vulnerable."³² At the center of the Catholic Church's concern for the environment and its contribution to the discussion on climate change is a priority for the poor. "As Catholics our faith calls us to care for all of God's creation, especially the 'least of these.' . . . Of particular concern to the Church is how climate change and the response to it will affect poor and vulnerable people here at home and around the world."³³

Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* insists that "care for 'the least of these' is a defining religious duty."³⁴ The presidents of nine Catholic bishops' conferences affirmed this message in a June 2008 letter to G-8 leaders,³⁵ and declared that care for the poor and vulnerable is also a "moral and *public* responsibility."³⁶

Vulnerable people in developing countries are likely to suffer the worst consequences of climate change. It is reported that increased drought, storm intensity, disease, species extinction, and flooding will only exacerbate the living conditions of people already living in poverty.³⁷ Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged some of the dangers facing vulnerable nations and people in his 2008 World Youth Day address. He stated, "Some of you come from island nations whose very existence is threatened by rising water levels; others from nations suffering the effects of devastating drought."³⁸ We are also witnessing the impacts of climate change on the poor through the service of Catholic Relief Services, the relief and development agency of the Catholic Church. As I stated before several leaders of the Senate on climate change:

The real "inconvenient truth" is that those who contribute least to climate change will be affected the most and have the least capac-

32. *Id.* at 4.

33. Calvo 2, *supra* note 25 (quoting *Matthew* 25:40).

34. *USCCB Testimony*, *supra* note 2, at 4.

35. See Letter from National Conferences of Catholic Bishops to the Leaders of the G8 Nations 2 (June 17, 2008), available at <http://www.devp.org/devpme/eng/advocacy/doc/G8LetterBishops.pdf>.

The poor, who have contributed least to the human activities that aggravate global climate change, are likely to experience a disproportionate share of its harmful effects, including potential conflicts, escalating energy costs, and health problems. This is true in our own countries as well as in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world. The costs of initiatives to prevent and adapt to the harmful consequences of climate change should be borne more by richer persons and nations who have benefited most from the emissions that have fueled development and should not unduly burden the poor. Specific mechanisms should be created to help poor persons and nations adapt to the effects of global climate change and adopt appropriate technologies that will enhance their development in ways that do not contribute to global climate change.

36. *USCCB Testimony*, *supra* note 2, at 4 (emphasis added).

37. Calvo 2, *supra* note 25; see also IPCC REPORT, *supra* note 26, at 51 fig.3.6.

38. WELCOMING CELEBRATION BY THE YOUNG PEOPLE, *supra* note 16, para. 9.

ity to cope or escape. The poor and vulnerable are most likely to pay the price of inaction or unwise actions. We know from our everyday experience their lives, homes, children, and work are most at risk.³⁹

Unfortunately, the voice of poor and vulnerable people who will be hurt most by climate change is often missing from the climate change debate. As the United States Bishops' Conference insisted, "This Committee and the religious community have an obligation to help make sure their voices are heard, their needs addressed, and their burdens eased as our nation and the world address climate change."⁴⁰

II. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The public debate around climate change has evolved for the most part from a question of "whether climate change exists" and how severe the consequences will be to the question of "what to do about it." In developing real solutions to this global environmental challenge there are several questions that should be considered. First, what are the consequences of inaction—doing nothing to address climate change? Second, who will be most impacted by climate change and policies to address it? Third, who has contributed the most to the creation of global climate change, and who should bear the greatest cost of addressing it?

Catholic principles provide a moral framework for considering these questions and shape the United States bishops' approach to climate change and the perspective we are bringing to Congress as it explores various policy options to address climate change. As I stated on behalf of the bishops in a June 2008 letter to Senate leaders, "[W]e believe that a central moral measure of climate change legislation is how it touches the poor and vulnerable."⁴¹

Sadly, too few advocates and institutions are lifting up the voice of the poor and how they will be impacted by climate change. When concern for the poor has been raised, sometimes it is used both as a *reason* why it is necessary to address climate change *and* as an *excuse* to postpone action or not take meaningful action.⁴² Those who use concern for the poor to oppose bold action argue that efforts to address climate change may hurt the poor by increasing their utility and other related expenses.

39. See Press Release, U.S. Conf. of Cath. Bishops, Bishop Wenski Calls for Priority for the Poor in Senate Climate Change Debate (May 21, 2008), <http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2008/08-077.shtml>. Cf. *USCCB Testimony*, *supra* note 2, at 4.

40. *USCCB Testimony*, *supra* note 2, at 4–5.

41. Letter from the Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski, Chairman, USCCB Comm. on Int'l Justice & Peace, to the United States Senate 2 (June 2, 2008), available at http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ltr_senate_climate_change.pdf [hereinafter *USCCB Letter to U.S. Senate*].

42. See *USCCB Testimony*, *supra* note 2, at 4.

It is true that *climate change policies* aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and addressing the consequences of climate change will not only have environmental but also *social and economic impacts*. The United States bishops recognize that both inaction and improperly structured climate change policies would have adverse consequences for the poor and vulnerable.⁴³ More importantly, the bishops believe that well designed climate change policies can both help address climate change and act to protect the poor and vulnerable.

To ensure that this primary concern for the poor and vulnerable is reflected in future climate policies, the USCCB has worked closely with its interfaith and Catholic partners, including the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE) and the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change (CCCC). The National Religious Partnership for the Environment, which began in 1993, seeks to bring a common religious voice to environmental issues.⁴⁴ In addition, the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, which is a common effort of national Catholic organizations and the USCCB, began in 2005 to encourage a more thoughtful dialogue about the ways in which the Catholic community can respond to climate change.⁴⁵

In an NRPE letter to members of Congress in August 2007, the President of the USCCB and other senior religious leaders of major faith communities expressed their "common conviction that the needs of people in poverty must be a central priority as [Congress develops] legislation to address the critical challenge of global climate change."⁴⁶ This letter presented four conclusions to help guide the discussion and development of climate policy:

- 1) There is sufficient scientific consensus about the dangers of global climate change and the moral principle of prudence requires us to act now to protect the common good.

43. A PLEA FOR DIALOGUE, *supra* note 19, at 3:

Inaction and inadequate or misguided responses to climate change will likely place even greater burdens on already desperately poor peoples. Action to mitigate global climate change must be built upon a foundation of social and economic justice that does not put the poor at greater risk or place disproportionate and unfair burdens on developing nations.

44. The National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE) represents four faith communities: the USCCB, the National Council of Churches, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, and the Evangelical Environmental Network. For further information on the activities of NRPE, see the NRPE website, <http://www.nrpe.org/>.

45. For further information on the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change (CCCC), see the CCCC website, <http://www.catholicsandclimatechange.org/>.

46. Letter from Senior Religious Leaders on Global Climate Change & Poverty to Member[s] of Congress 1 (Aug. 1, 2007), *available at* <http://www.nrpe.org/pressmaterials/lettertomemofcongress.pdf>.

- 2) There is persuasive evidence that the consequences of climate change will fall disproportionately on the world's most vulnerable people and inaction will only worsen their suffering.
- 3) Policies aimed at addressing global climate change should seek to enhance rather than diminish the economic situation of people in poverty.
- 4) Policies should seek to help vulnerable populations here and abroad *adapt* to adverse climate impacts and actively participate in efforts to address climate change.⁴⁷

National climate change policies which will reduce the amount of carbon emitted into the atmosphere by putting a price on carbon emissions will also raise the price of energy, and many other related products and services.⁴⁸ While this price increase can create incentives to stimulate the development of cleaner sources of energy and encourage investment in energy-efficiency, it could also have a disproportionate economic impact on low-income individuals and families in the United States if climate policies are not structured properly.⁴⁹ Additional consequences of climate policy and the transition to a low-carbon economy include major impacts on workers within older industries, some of whom would likely lose their jobs.

However, as the USCCB and other members of NRPE highlighted in a joint document on the moral dimensions of climate change, *A Relig-*

47. *Id.*

48. CTR. ON BUDGET & POL'Y PRIORITIES, CLIMATE-CHANGE POLICIES CAN TREAT LOW-INCOME FAMILIES FAIRLY AND BE FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE 2 (rev. May 12, 2008), <http://www.cbpp.org/climate-brochure.pdf> [hereinafter CLIMATE-CHANGE POLICIES]:

Effective climate-change policies (whether a cap-and-trade system or a carbon tax) put a price on dumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. . . . Both methods encourage energy efficiency and alternative energy sources. Both also raise the costs of a wide array of products and services, from gasoline and electricity to food, mass transit, and other products or services with significant energy inputs.

49. *See id.* at 1:

Higher energy prices affect households with limited incomes the most. They spend a larger share of their budgets on basic necessities like energy than better-off households do. They also are less able to afford investments that can reduce their energy demand, such as a more efficient car or a new heating and cooling system.

and at 2:

That will pose special challenges for low- and moderate-income families, who pay a larger share of their budgets for energy-related costs than higher-income families. . . . Poor and near-poor families will face the biggest challenges. Unless climate-change legislation includes adequate measures to shield low-income families, even a modest 15 percent reduction in greenhouse-gas emissions would impose an estimated \$750 a year in added costs, on average, on a family in the bottom 20 percent of the income spectrum. These households have average incomes only modestly over \$13,000.

ious Agenda on Poverty and Global Climate Change, unique opportunities can be created through climate policy to protect the disadvantaged from suffering the worst consequences of climate change and bearing undue burdens of climate change policy.⁵⁰

In fact, many policy approaches to address climate change will generate new and substantial financial resources by putting a price on carbon emissions.⁵¹ The USCCB and its interfaith partners *insist* that a significant portion of these resources should be used to minimize the disproportionate burdens felt by those least able to cope with the impacts of climate change.⁵² This includes low-income communities in the United States, people living in poverty within poorer nations, vulnerable popula-

50. NAT'L RELIGIOUS P'SHIP FOR THE ENV'T, A RELIGIOUS AGENDA ON POVERTY AND GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE 2 (2007), http://www.nrpe.org/pressmaterials/nrpe_design04.pdf [hereinafter NRPE AGENDA]:

Fortunately, these ethical principles and the related priorities and policies—which flow directly from our faith and unite our diverse religious communities—are as attainable as they are essential. In fact, the primary legislative approaches now under consideration by Congress will produce substantial resources and unique opportunities—not just to protect the disadvantaged from environmental degradation and higher energy bills, but to improve their quality of life and our communities in the process. In particular, they offer tremendous potential through our free market system to create and promote new technologies, new industries, new jobs, and new sources of income, as well as new ways to help the voiceless and vulnerable protect themselves from the dangers of climate change.

51. Examples of such policy approaches include a cap and trade system or a carbon tax, both of which put a price on emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere; *see also* CLIMATE-CHANGE POLICIES, *supra* note 48, at 3 (“A cap-and-trade system could eventually generate \$50 billion to \$300 billion a year, depending on its design and the stringency of the caps, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO). (A carbon tax that reduced greenhouse-gas emissions by comparable amounts would raise comparable amounts of revenue.)”).

52. NRPE AGENDA, *supra* note 50, at 2:

[W]e believe that any plan will be substantively incomplete as a matter of policy and morally unacceptable as an expression of our values if it does not make protecting those least able to protect themselves a central priority. That means, in our view, taking meaningful and measurable steps to shield vulnerable populations from the disproportionate dangers they are likely to be exposed to as the planet warms, to spread the economic costs of changing our energy habits fairly and sustainably, and to limit the financial burdens that will be placed on low-income and working families by new regulations on global warming pollution.

See also USCCB Testimony, *supra* note 2, at 5:

Therefore, responses to climate change need to provide significant new resources to help those most at risk and with the least capacity in addressing and overcoming poverty and providing for sustainable development at home and abroad. Under proposals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions—whether to cap and trade, adopt carbon taxes, or implement other measures—the significant resources raised should be used for public purposes, especially to reduce the disproportionate burdens of those least able to bear the impacts of climate change.

tions including the elderly and children, and workers within older industries.⁵³

As I stated on behalf of the U.S. bishops' conference in a June 2008 letter to the Senate, the bishops support policy recommendations which "further assure that those with the greatest needs receive the most help through effective, targeted and workable allocations, vehicles and programs."⁵⁴

In the United States, this requires targeting assistance to low-income individuals and families to help offset the impact of higher energy costs including utility, transportation, and other associated costs. For example, an adequate percentage of the revenue generated through a cap and trade system or a carbon tax should be used to fund climate rebates that would give money back to the poorest individuals and families to help offset the impact of higher energy costs resulting from climate legislation.⁵⁵

The transition from a carbon-intensive economy to a low-carbon economy will also create a need to assist workers within coal-based industries and related industries. A shift to a low-carbon economy, which will stimulate the development of renewable and clean-energy resources, has the potential to create many new jobs. In the United States bishops' 2001 statement on climate change, the bishops declare that climate policies should provide transition assistance to workers within these affected industries.⁵⁶ The creation of these new "green" jobs presents an opportunity to train not only workers within affected industries but also those most in need with the skills to succeed in this new economy.

For developing countries, climate change is both an issue of survival and sustainable development. In the bishops' statement on climate change and in USCCB testimony before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, the bishops offered the following important observations. First, wealthier nations such as the United States, who have played a disproportionate role in causing climate change, have a responsibility to play a leadership role in addressing the "moral, human, and

53. *USCCB Testimony*, *supra* note 2, at 5.

54. *USCCB Letter to U.S. Senate*, *supra* note 41, at 2.

55. See CLIMATE-CHANGE POLICIES, *supra* note 48, at 4–5; see also NRPE AGENDA, *supra* note 50, at 3 ("Providing temporary rebates to American low-income and working families to offset any substantial rise in energy prices resulting from climate change legislation.").

56. A PLEA FOR DIALOGUE, *supra* note 19, at 15 ("Within the United States, public policy should assist industrial sectors and workers especially impacted by climate change policies, and it should offer incentives to corporations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and assistance to workers affected by these policies."); see also NRPE AGENDA, *supra* note 50, at 5 ("Congress should focus on helping the economy create new well-paying[, climate-friendly] jobs and assisting workers who lose their jobs as a result of new climate regulations and other policies.").

environmental costs” of climate change and climate policies.⁵⁷ Pope Benedict XVI emphasized this point in his 2008 World Day of Peace Message, stating, “If the protection of the environment involves costs, they should be justly distributed, taking due account of the different levels of development of various countries and the need for solidarity with future generations.”⁵⁸

For developed countries, such as the United States, playing a leadership role in addressing the costs of climate change requires several steps. It begins with developing an awareness of the impact of our consumption patterns on the rest of the world. Although rich countries like the United States only account for 15% of the world’s population, they create almost half of the world’s CO₂ emissions.⁵⁹ As stated in the 2007/08 United Nations Human Development Report, “the economic model which drives growth, and the profligate consumption in rich nations that goes with it, is ecologically unsustainable.”⁶⁰ Instead, as the U.S. bishops insist, “affluent nations [must] seek ways to reduce and restructure their over consumption.”⁶¹ It also involves taking effective steps to reduce emissions through climate policies and legislation. In terms of its responsibility to its neighbors, it means *working together with other nations* to identify real and long-lasting solutions to address climate change. As Pope Benedict XVI declared in his 2008 Message for the World Day of Peace, “time is short” and there is a need for nations to cooperate and to “choose the path of dialogue rather than the path of unilateral decisions.”⁶² The United States is called to work with other nations and to exercise leadership in the search for equitable and effective policies.

57. *USCCB Testimony*, *supra* note 2, at 5 (“Richer countries should take the lead, particularly the United States, in addressing climate change and the moral, human, and environmental costs of addressing it.”); *see also* A PLEA FOR DIALOGUE, *supra* note 19, at 14 (“As an act of solidarity and in the interest of the common good, the United States should lead the developed nations in contributing to the sustainable economic development of poorer nations and to help build their capacity to ease climate change.”).

58. A COMMUNITY OF PEACE, *supra* note 9, para. 7.

59. UNITED NATIONS DEV. PROGRAMME, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2007/2008: FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE: HUMAN SOLIDARITY IN A DIVIDED WORLD 14, http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_20072008_summary_english.pdf.

60. *Id.* at 27.

61. RENEWING THE EARTH, *supra* note 16, Part III.G.

62. A COMMUNITY OF PEACE, *supra* note 9, para. 8:

In this regard, it is essential to “sense” that the earth is “our common home” and, in our stewardship and service to all, to choose the path of dialogue rather than the path of unilateral decisions. Further international agencies may need to be established in order to confront together the stewardship of this “home” of ours; more important, however, is the need for ever greater conviction about the need for responsible cooperation. The problems looming on the horizon are complex and time is short. In order to face this situation effectively, there is a need to act in harmony.

More specifically, the United States has a responsibility to assist those within the most vulnerable developing countries to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change.⁶³ As stated before, climate policies can generate significant revenue and provide essential resources to help address the disproportionate impact of climate change on the most vulnerable people and nations around the world who have contributed least to the creation of climate change. The bishops' conference and others have called on Congressional leaders to use this new revenue generated through climate policy to help the most vulnerable people in the most vulnerable developing countries adapt to the impacts of climate change and develop low-carbon economies.⁶⁴ We also emphasize that this funding must be in addition to and not in place of other overseas relief and development assistance.⁶⁵

Even in the face of climate change, poor countries still have a basic right to develop, and people in these countries have a right to live with dignity and not in poverty. Their children cannot be left behind in deprivation. Clearly, these countries will need assistance from wealthier nations so they can develop and grow in ways that do not harm the environment and further contribute to climate change.⁶⁶ For these reasons, the USCCB has made it clear that wealthier nations must identify ways to share affordable and appropriate technology with poorer ones to help them mitigate the impacts of climate change and develop sustainably.⁶⁷

63. NRPE AGENDA, *supra* note 50, at 7 ("The United States should assist countries with the fewest resources and the highest exposure to the dangers of climate change—and who have contributed the least to global warming pollution—in adapting to climate change and developing low-carbon economies."). The term "most vulnerable developing countries" refers to least developed countries; low-lying and other small island developing countries; developing countries with low-lying coastal, arid, and semi-arid areas or areas liable to floods, drought, and desertification; and developing countries with fragile mountainous ecosystems.

64. USCCB Testimony, *supra* note 2, at 6 ("Funds generated from cap and trade programs or carbon taxes should be used for public purposes with a significant portion dedicated to help the poor in our country and around the world address the costs of climate change and responses to it.").

65. See NRPE AGENDA, *supra* note 50, at 7 ("Require funding for adaptation programs to be in addition to and not in lieu of other federal funding for overseas relief and development efforts.").

66. USCCB Testimony, *supra* note 2, at 5 ("Low-income communities and countries have the same right as we do to economic and social development to overcome poverty and need help in ways that do not harm the environment and contribute to a worsening of global climate change.").

67. NRPE AGENDA, *supra* note 50, at 8 ("Promote the development and use of appropriate climate-friendly technologies that will create new businesses, new jobs, and new opportunities for economic growth."); USCCB Testimony, *supra* note 2, at 6 ("Richer countries should find suitable ways to make available appropriate technologies to low-income countries."); see also A PLEA FOR DIALOGUE, *supra* note 19, at 12:

In a March 2008 letter from the National Religious Partnership for the Environment to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, the bishops' conference and its interfaith partners emphasized the importance of consulting local communities and seeking their input in the development of plans to help them adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change.⁶⁸ The voices of the poor must be heard and heeded.

III. COMMON ACTION FOR THE COMMON GOOD

"Catholic Social teaching calls for bold and generous action on behalf of the common good."⁶⁹ Following the leadership of the Vatican and Pope John Paul II's and Pope Benedict XVI's efforts to raise awareness about humanity's responsibility to care for creation, members of the Catholic community have become increasingly engaged in this important issue.⁷⁰

In an effort to promote dialogue and build common ground among various interests, in the spring of 2007, the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, along with the support of the state Catholic conferences, hosted a series of unique climate change listening sessions in Florida, Ohio, and Alaska. These hearings brought together public officials, leaders from business, labor, the environment, and religion to examine Catholic teaching on climate change, the scientific consensus around the issue, and what is at stake for poor people, businesses, local communities, and our natural world.⁷¹

In Alaska, panelists including a scientist; the Administrator of Newtok, Alaska; and Native Alaskans described some of the changes they have seen to their environment in recent years, which could be attributed to climate change. According to their testimonies, rising tide levels and flooding have required whole villages to relocate, and changing wildlife

Developing countries have a right to economic development that can help lift people out of dire poverty. Wealthier industrialized nations have the resources, know-how, and entrepreneurship to produce more efficient cars and cleaner industries. These countries need to share these emerging technologies with the less-developed countries and assume more of the financial responsibility that would enable poorer countries to afford them. This would help developing countries adopt energy-efficient technologies more rapidly while still sustaining healthy economic growth and development.

68. Letter from Walter E. Grazer, Special Advisor, Nat'l Religious P'ship for the Env't, to Bettina Poirer, Staff Dir., S. Comm. on Env't & Pub. Works (Mar. 25, 2008) (on file with author); *see also* NRPE AGENDA, *supra* note 50, at 8 ("Promote citizen participation in the development of energy options that best meet local and regional needs.").

69. A PLEA FOR DIALOGUE, *supra* note 19, at 13.

70. Calvo 1, *supra* note 1, paras. 33–36.

71. For more information on the hearings, see Cath. Coal. on Climate Change, Coalition Activities: Hosting Hearings, http://www.catholicsandclimatechange.org/coalition_activities/hearings.html (last visited Mar. 3, 2009).

migration patterns have affected the food supply upon which many Native Alaskans depend.

In my own state of Florida, we brought together Church and community leaders and representatives from the insurance, local government, and science sectors to raise awareness of the unique challenges facing my state, including threats to the distinct habitat of Florida's everglades and an increase in the frequency and intensity of hurricanes. Severe weather events have placed a greater burden on home owners and renters, and particularly low-income households, who could potentially be displaced from their homes and face rising insurance premiums. Insurance providers have raised their premiums in order to cover the escalating costs from increased damage to homes and property. State agencies have also been affected financially, as they have expanded their services in order to provide property insurance at a discounted rate to people who can no longer afford private insurance. Overall, these hearings helped foster dialogue and better inform Catholic leadership in these states and at the national level about the complexities of climate change and the challenges we face.

In the spring of 2008, the USCCB and the Coalition developed an innovative grants program to help national Catholic organizations integrate climate change activities into their ongoing education, outreach, and advocacy efforts. Eleven national Catholic organizations were awarded grants and are taking impressive steps forward. Catholic Charities USA will educate its members about the impacts of climate change for their clients and the variety of direct services they provide. Catholic Health Association is working with the major health systems to develop education and action programs that will help make their facilities more energy-efficient as well as explore health care impacts related to climate change on the poor and how Catholic health care might better respond. These are just a few examples of the action being taken by national Catholic organizations.⁷²

In response to the call of the United States bishops and Pope Benedict XVI to examine our lifestyle and demonstrate in concrete ways our concern for God's creation and the poor, the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change recently launched an unprecedented educational initiative in April, the *Catholic Climate Covenant: The St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor*.⁷³ This initiative, offering a distinctively Catholic perspective on global climate change, will demonstrate a common Catholic commitment to care for God's creation and to stand with poor and

72. See generally Press Release, Cath. Coal. on Climate Change, 2008 National Capacity-Building Grants for Global Climate Change (May 27, 2008), http://www.catholicsandclimatechange.org/pdf/Grants_summary_08.pdf.

73. See Cath. Coal. on Climate Change, *Catholic Climate Covenant: The St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor*, http://www.catholicsandclimatechange.org/coalition_activities/covenant.html (last visited Mar. 3, 2009).

vulnerable people in our nation and around the world facing the worst impacts of climate change.

Catholic individuals, parishes, schools, and other institutions will be encouraged to join the Covenant by taking the St. Francis Pledge and making a solemn commitment to honor God's creation and serve the poor. The Pledge will consist of five elements: prayer, education, assessment, action, and advocacy. The Covenant on its website will offer dozens of ways for Catholic individuals and organizations to fulfill the Pledge.

By the time of the launch around Earth Day 2009, it is our hope that there will be over a dozen national Catholic organizations that will have signed the Pledge including: the Franciscan Action Network, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, and the Catholic Health Association of the United States, among others.

Catholic colleges and universities are also taking positive steps to increase awareness about environmental issues and to green their campuses, offices, and organizations:

Around 24 Catholic colleges and universities have become members of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, an organization that provides its members with research materials and techniques for how to green their campuses. Among the association's members, is the University of Notre Dame in Indiana which opened an Office of Sustainability this May [2008,] . . . Santa Clara University [which] has integrated ecological education into its curriculum and the University of St. Francis [which] sponsors an annual "Green Week" of educational events to promote environmental awareness, especially around climate change.⁷⁴

CONCLUSION

The Catholic community has a unique and necessary contribution to offer to the discussion of environmental issues and to the debate about global climate change. This distinct perspective is shaped by the scriptures, Catholic teaching, and basic moral principles. Perhaps the most important contribution the Catholic Church has to offer is linking care of God's creation to care of God's poor, natural ecology to human ecology. Pope Benedict XVI in his 2007 World Day of Peace Message demonstrated that one can not be achieved without the other.

74. Calvo 1, *supra* note 1, para. 36; see also Mandi Stirone, *Catholic Colleges, Universities Take Steps to Go Green*, CATH. NEWS SERV., Aug. 4, 2008, available at <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0803985.htm>; Univ. of St. Francis, *Greening of Campus*, <http://www.stfrancis.edu/green/index.htm> (last visited Mar. 3, 2009).

[H]umanity, if it truly desires peace, must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology. Experience shows that *disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence*, and vice versa. It becomes more and more evident that there is an inseparable link between peace with creation and peace among men.⁷⁵

Leaders and Catholics throughout our community of faith are demonstrating how the Catholic faith calls us to care for God's creation and the "least of these." From Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI to the United States bishops and national Catholic organizations, universities, and parishes, the Catholic Church is lifting up the moral dimensions of climate change and environmental concerns for how they affect the human family and particularly how they touch the poor and vulnerable.

As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops declared:

In that spirit of praise and thanksgiving to God for the wonders of creation, we Catholic bishops call for a civil dialogue and prudent and constructive action to protect God's precious gift of the earth's atmosphere with a sense of genuine solidarity and justice for all God's children.⁷⁶

75. POPE BENEDICT XVI, MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE: THE HUMAN PERSON, THE HEART OF PEACE para. 8 (Jan. 1, 2007), *available at* http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace_en.html.

76. A PLEA FOR DIALOGUE, *supra* note 19, at 17.